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“NATO Membership: Has the time come?”
Transcript

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2:00-3:30PM

Featuring:

Fatmir Mediu

Albanian Minister of Defense

Branko Vukelic

Croatian Minister of Defense

Lazar Elenovski

Macedonian Minister of Defense

Moderated by **Ambassador Robert Hunter**

Fred Kempe- President of the Atlantic Council:

We are in a historic point in post cold war transatlantic relations I see many people in this room who have been involved at certain points in these changes and have realized how far we have come since the early 1990's. Bringing the transatlantic three into the transatlantic community will bring us much closer to our aspiration.

I am eager to hear the Ministers perspectives on NATO and what does it mean not only to Europe but also the transatlantic community. I would like to thank Jim Townsend. Vice president of the Atlantic Council and Head of the International Security program, who has been recently promoted because of the great work that he has done and to Magnus Nordenam and Jeff Lightfoot who have worked with him on this event. I also want to introduce today's moderator Ambassador Robert Hunter who is a key member of our board of directors and is also president of the Atlantic treaty organization and I see key figures also from the Atlantic treaty organization in the audience and we are glad to have you here. He was the US ambassador to NATO under President Clinton. Currently Senior advisor to the RAND corporation. Bob's intimately involved with the issues of the Balkans having served as a US ambassador during some of the more trying days in the region. With that I will turn over to Ambassador Hunter to introduce the panelists.

Robert Hunter:

Well Fred thank you very much, it is an honor to be here and I am particular honored to be here with these three gentlemen. When we first started talking about NATO enlargement back in the 1990's we set some high standards; we said that if countries want to get in that they have got to be producers not consumers. That it is not just a free pass. We are not just opening up the door to everybody that wants to come through.. But to societies who have demonstrated a number of things. One, that they are solid democracies, two that they take security seriously, three, that their vocation, finally and forever will be with Europe Atlantic institutions. The three gentlemen representing their countries today have passed every conceivable task to become NATO allies. It is our hope that 43 days from now, when the NATO allies gather in Bucharest, that there is going to be a chorus of 'eye' votes that there is a unanimity of what is required and to honor what these three leaders of their defense establishments have done. I think we will probable take this in the order in which you are listed here. Alphabetical order for the countries as they are listed here and I am going to call them Albania, Croatia and Macedonia – no qualifiers here when you come here to the Atlantic council (laughter) And we start with Fatmir Mediu who is the minister of defense for the Republic of Albania since September 2005 and who in the next two days is going to have to think about the new ally and friend who he is going to have next door in Kosovo. What is to happen in Kosovo depends in a large extent to the leadership and mental leadership of Albania as we move forward to welcome another country to a family of Atlantic nations. Minister Mediu started out in the Republican party in 1990 , he was there you might say at the very beginning. As someone who has been around , I have a high amount of envy for the three of you , being able to build countries from the ground up. We haven't done that here for some 200 or so some years, remembering that Jefferson was 44 when he wrote the declaration of independence, I'm about 36 so its ok. Mr Mediu has been active in parliament, active in the creation of democratic institutions, in a country in which, when I was growing up we never thought was going to be a democracy. So salutations and salute to you Mr. Minister. We are looking forward to hearing your presentation as we start to augment your march to membership in 43 days.

Fatmir Mediu:

Thank you very much Ambassador Hunter. I'm counting every minute and working days which are less than 43. I want to thank you all for being here with us today, ladies and gentlemen. As a secretary or Minister of Defense it is a real privilege to work with men in uniform. It is a privilege as they are always there when you call upon them for a duty and always respond. And in my very early day s I had the privilege to meet with the Supreme Commander of NATO General Jones. I was trying to understand what I was doing or what I was trying to do and listening carefully and trying to understand and those who are here with us today, I really appreciate you being with me today here. And I hope that Albania is doing well and I doing well, and at least you will qualify me as a professional soldier in the future. So that is what we are trying to do, listen hard and carefully and learning every day is a great experience. To see us here together today Macedonia,

Croatia, Albania in order to present our case to everybody. Convinced that our time has come, I believe that we do not want to take anything for granted. Determine to work hard and continue to work hard. About more than half a century ago a well known politician speaking English said 'that the Balkans have produced more history than it can absorb', it was Churchill. I am not yet to judge his opinion but tell how much we have changed, from the history of conflict to the stability of cooperation. The A3 is a great example. From the domination of one ethnic group over the other one to the multi-democratic society that still has a long way to go. From conflicts within the region to religious intolerance and I am happy to declare that Albania, my country brings religious tolerance as an added value to the modern world. We came out of isolation to open societies. From communism to the open market societies where values are added to the basics of everything that we do. From paranoid forces to the new rise in constructions and concepts NATO wants. From armed forces big in numbers but without any operation capabilities ready to fight the neighbors, while today we fight side by side with America in Afghanistan and Iraq. I mentioned that not to justify anything about the past our regions or countries, but to tell about the future and the perspective and for this we want to thank you very much the United States of America. Hard for some to decide the role of the half of the United States so far away from here in Washington, but our people are so grateful to the American people and your government for the great support that you have given to us.

I carefully listened to General Jones when we were talking, challenges are global and thus our approach must be global. One team one fight. Our time has come. Indeed the A3 countries out looking forward to the upcoming Bucharest summit with expectations for a sound degree of realism. The question that everyone in this room might put is 'why do a thing, it is time for the A3 countries to join NATO, why should NATO continue to anchor Eastern European democracies to the West. At the last Munich conference we heard quite assertive declarations about the A3 countries and there invitation to the Bucharest summit. We heard from Secretary Shepard and Secretary Gates, Senator McCain German and Polish ministers of defense and many other personalities. But while we listen to such statements our joy for fulfilling our membership is grounded on what we have been able to do for change in our countries. It is an essential milestone in the history of our region. NATO has been present and active in our region for about two decades. Has demonstrated NATO capabilities to deal with delicate matters as well as it's capacity to absorb. On the other hand it has helped the region to grow to stand on its feet and understand its responsibilities. Over the years our countries have undertaken comprehensive reforms having three main incentives. One, being the well being of our country and citizens. Two, becoming a reliable partner for peace and security. Three, building a stable and secure region. The greatest good that you can do for one and another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own riches. While we stand ready to share NATO regional responsibilities We cannot overlook the fact that NATO's greatest success in the Balkans has been helping us believe that in Balkan have great potential for peace and constructive cooperation, contrary to classic Balkan perception. We have seen Bosnia- Herzegovina, Serbia Montego admitted in Partnership of Peace and this was good news for all of us. On the 17th declared the independence and managed to build a country that belongs to everyone Albanian Serbs everybody. Working for their European future. Serbia with the outcome the recent

election has confirmed its Atlantic orientation. Albanian, Croatia, Macedonia with the help of the United States has shown that the United States charter was indeed a very successful project with a great impact on the regional stability.

On 24th of May last year I was in Brussels with our Prime Minister Berisha and the leader of the opposition presented our case there based on the member action plan. We were there first to show that Albanian politicians don't have any disputes over NATO integration. We were the first country to call for NATO membership from the Eastern European countries and we are all working together under a similar understanding, putting our countries first and then our political interests. And some issues were raised during this meeting. Like we have to work together establishing the flow, elect the president in full compliance with the constitution, moving on with judicial reform and we are doing so. We were in Brussels again in the last membership action plan cycle and I was very happy to see the positive reaction of all the Ambassadors about what we are doing. But is that enough? No, we have to continue because the transformation reforms never end and we have to work for our own people. While the Ambassador congratulated our achievements and our new political culture. We reconfirmed that we are going to move ahead with reforms with the Europe Atlantic visions of Albania, supported by our Albanian people by over 90%. But listen with the same interest to the concerns. We have a new president now elected in full compliance with the constitution which he has shown he stands above the parties. The parliament recently documented resolutions on reforms endorsed by the opposition, expressing the commitment of all the parties for a constructive approach. Judicial reform is also progressing, we approve the law on organizations of the judiciary and we are working on the election reform. Also good progress in the fight against crime and corruption. With no regard to political colors. The economic situation is stable and growing with the 6% increase of the GDP a year. Resulting with the pouring in of investment in the country and we are blessed with numerous opportunities. When we have the economy grow this is good news for the Ministry of Defense as well and the country as it helps the defense budget and thanks to this understanding and the help of the government and all the political parties, now we have 2.1% of the GDP for the defense budget- not just 2% but 2.1%. But having is something and doing is something different. I know that the Minister of Finance is there to see if I make a mistake so that is what I am trying to do know to consider and to move in the right direction with the money of the taxpayers.

As Minister of defense let me speak a little about defense reforms in Albania. Our aim is to create an efficient right sized armed force. In the beginning of the nineties, and I know that some of you were here in the nineties, Albanian had about 100,000 military personnel and about 300,000 including reserves. Based on a joint construct and joint structure we are working to bring it to 14,500. It is a big social problem and also it is a mentality change as well. Another important step is getting rid of legacies of the past. Where everything was based on gigantisms and actual conceptions of actual threats. The other day I visited one of our airbases and I met this pilot Major and I asked him how he felt about my decision to ground all the DOP there. And he answered 'Listen minister you killed the armed forces'. I think that the biggest problem is challenging the old mentality. And I am happy to mention that the leadership of the Albanian armed forces are open minded great people that are working to change the Albanian armed forces.

Dismissing the reserve component I remember very well. It was eating 10% of our whole budget. So this was top decision at the time but thanks to clear understanding and a clear goal we moved ahead. The main challenge for me as Minister of Defense is having a full professional force by 2010, 3 years before it was planned. Even the budget has gone below 2% than it was planned, it was 2% by 2010 and now it is 2008. The 2.1% of the GDP will help me, will help us to sustain our long term development plan including the modernization of the armed forces and that is a very critical issue as I have figured out that the gifts are sometimes more expensive than buying new things. So that's what we are trying to do now, trying to change the perspective. And why not, while we are speaking about A3 the Balkans deserve to get into NATO. Some cost sharing in the security system that show we can work together. It is going to build more trust it is going to build more operational capabilities especially for peace keeping operations. While working together to build a solid armed force which serves the sovereignty of our country and growing cooperation in NATO peace keeping operations. We are working to develop a deployable 8% land component of joint command and are working with the 40% ready for rotations. Our soldiers were deployed from the very beginning of the operation in Bosnia Herzegovina for eleven years. In ISAF we are present with a platoon in Kabul, with Turks we have a joint action together medical team also in Kabul. Following the recent request that countries increase their contribution in Afghanistan we handed another company in last July and we are working right now with Britain and also with Germany in our (MLT's) combined MLTs. The experience that we have gained in peace support operations was enormous. Our center of excellence learning that the lesson learned went out to all of our combat units. In 2008 we will continue our recent contribution, as I mentioned in all these peace co operations and in some more involvements. We will continue also in Bosnia Herzegovina. I can't keep up with my prime minister and the ministers of foreign affairs, everywhere that they go they are ready to deploy. Saying that the place that I am going to deploy next time will be you. We are working hard on that, but we are also trying to secure the European security contributing also in missions.

From May 2007 Albanian is part of the NATO active endeavor; it is an important operation for Albania in the Croatian sea and fighting organized crime terrorists. I am proud to declare that thanks to the Norman Nola program from September 2007 Albania is the first country to eliminate all chemical weapons. Albania has been a major region of stability in the western Balkans. Regional dialogue and transparency provide the foundations of Albania foreign policy. Continuing the excellence spread of A3, we opened up last year a senior course in security studies in Tirana. And we are going to move ahead with the Italian defense college in order that we can have everybody working on the same script and understanding. Our aim is to make this regional college on defense matters as very priority on the meeting that we are going to have tomorrow. Relations with all our neighbors are all underlined with a sense of good will cultural understanding and cooperation. We support the involvement of the new partnership for peace, countries like Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Montenegro in all the regional initiatives and projects. Offering our experience in your Atlantic perspective.

As I mentioned before, Kosovo has recently declared independence, this very important moment not only for Kosovo but the Balkans itself. This new decision has opened a new chapter for Kosovo. Also, helping the transition, in my belief of Serbia. And starting a

new chapter of all Balkans. Leaving the past behind and steering toward NATO and EU integration. The declaration of independence, pointed out the way ahead. The plan working together serves the Europe Atlantic future. Off all and all people of Kosovo , all ethnic groups. European Kosovo and eventually NATO and EU. In true cooperation with the UN A4 mission. The main challenge for Kosovo will have to be the recognition of its independence, integration of the Serbian community and the governance and the building of democratic institutions and the rule of law and undoubtedly the greatest challenge is the economic development of Kosovo, the fight against unemployment and poverty. The Albanian government is interested in finishing as soon as possible the Pristina highway as vital for the communication and economies of both countries will facilitate business in Kosovo. Albania has changed as well and this is why I believe that our time has come. I believe that the politicians have changed as well; they have changed their behavior and attitude.

God has provided us everything, so when we started creating that part of the Balkans he gave us rivers lakes and forests and the neighbors started to complain – saying God what are you doing, you are giving so much to these Balkan people and God said that I have more to give to them so he gave mountains hills, he gave sea he gave everything that people can touch and see. And they started complaining again , saying God that is unfair, you are giving too much to this region that is totally unfair and God added I have to give something more I'll give them some politician (laughter)

But this has changed, politicians have the same focus working together, because we have no other way out working for the best of our people, for the best of our countries, for the best of our region, for the best of Europe for the best of NATO being part of a family of shared values because this is the deep values of our people as well. Thank you very much

Robert Hunter:

Thank you very much Minister I think that if God gave politicians to just about all our countries, it's a shared gift, but some of them like yourself rise above it. I was particularly struck about when you spoke about changing the mentality. That's what it has been really about over the last 20 years in a stunning capacity of peoples , once given a chance of freedom to show yes, a production of a lot of history and yes a production for a lot of history as well. Before preceding I want to make sure that we understand very clearly that we are here today because of the generosity and sponsorship because of members of very good folks, Bob Beecroft of L-3 communications who I had a chance at working at NATO and Bob Geldar and Ann Bader of the Washington global partners. Thank you very much for making this possible.

Now to Croatia, Branko Vukelic is now the youngest of the three here in the sense that he has only been in the office now for only about a month and he is partaking in trying to get his nation into NATO. This is quite an achievement after only being a month. Trained engineer, involved in the practical side of politics and governance throughout his career since the independence of his country. He has achieved something that is more important than being a minister, he has been a Mayor of his city . And believe me you don't have to get any more responsible than having to live with things, than that; fixing pot holes when people call you in the middle of the night. Head of the general secretary of the Croatian democratic union and since 2003 he was minister of economy, labor and entrepreneurship

things to build his country so that it would have the basis for him to be the defense minister to help lead his country to pass the test to join NATO. Minister thank you very much for being here with us

Branko Vukelic:

Mr. Hunter thank you for your kind words. I think that I am not the youngest minister of defense but I am newest. Ladies and gentlemen it is a great privilege for me to be here at the Atlantic Council to discuss with you reforms in our countries the US Adriatic Charter and about NATO. The US Adriatic Charter has proved to be important for Croatia. It has assisted us for our membership in NATO by broadening activities which has contributed to our defensive force. The charter is also important for maintaining the visibility of our individual countries efforts as well as maintaining NATO focus. Croatia would like to see an invitation to all three countries at the Bucharest summit. We feel that this would contribute to securing the stone of stability in this region. The Charter has also assisted us in our NATO led cooperation in Afghanistan. Where we have a medical team with our Macedonia and Albanian partners. Besides that it has provided us with a number of exercise and training abilities preparing our armed forces for participation in NATO led operations. Finally the charter has assisted us in our regional security efforts. Providing an important forum for the discussion of regional security issues. Croatia became a member of NATO's participation for peace in 2000 and immediately expressed its intention to join the others. In 2002 Croatia entered the Membership action plan, which aimed to aid countries who inspired towards membership. Ever since then Croatia has been participating in all reforms in which it needs to be met. EU has also conducted its EU accession process. NATO and EU interconnected and complimentary. By implementing reforms necessary for EU membership Croatia also implements reforms which are necessary for NATO membership.

Croatia's transition to democracy was principal for the transition to the transition of other eastern European countries which are today members of NATO and EU. It was however, delayed by the war and the crisis of the last century. Today Croatia is a vibrant democracy and market economy. The basic values of Croatia are the same values as those of the NATO Atlantic community. Croatian perspective of the world is very similar to that of NATO members. As is clear not only from Croatian documents like the NATO Strategic policy but also through practical steps which Croatia has been making. Like the participation of the Croatian armed forces and the participation of the Croatian armed forces in Afghanistan. International proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is the biggest threat to international security today and in the future.

Croatia feels that the Europe Atlantic cooperation and the role of NATO are key elements in the struggle against these threats. We consider that our role in Afghanistan is focused against them. Croatia is interested to help the government of Afghanistan establish its control over the entire country. Control by the legitimate government of Afghanistan will deprive terrorist and extremist groups as well as organized crime and safe havens and will contribute to our security and our allies and partners. In order to participate in NATO led operations, especially in operation far away from home as is the one in Afghanistan. We have to undergo comprehensive health reforms. NATO and European allies have assisted Croatia by advice and transfer of experience. The Croatia defense reform is still

ongoing. The key objective of the reform is to transform the Croatian armed forces into smaller professional well trained and equipped mobile expeditary force able to commit to whole spectrum to the whole spectrum of NATO led operations. NATO's experts who frequently assist Croatia and its reform are pleased with Croatian progress. Basically the only issue that has been brought up in the last couple of years has been the support of the Croatian Public to the membership. The public support for NATO membership used to be as low as 30%. However, since the last year Croatian citizens have become more aware about what NATO membership is and what it is not, what NATO's role is and what NATO's membership will really mean for the country. Today public support for the membership is about 50, 51% and the public relations campaign continues.

The Croatian prime minister recently met with the North Atlantic council on January 15th this year. This meeting marked the successful sixth MAP cycle. During the meeting all allies had agreed that Croatia had made strong process. In implementing far reaching economical and military reforms. Allies also approved of Croatia's regional approach to issues as well as Croatia's contribution to NATO led operations. The Prime minister confirmed that Croatia will continue toward reforms at the same pace and with the same level of commitment.

Croatia expects that NATO's summit in April this year be an enlargement summit. Croatia is willing to become a member of the alliance. When inviting Croatia NATO will gain a reliable ally. Be able to assume its proper position in the alliance and partner in building a safer and more secure environment. Thank you very much

Robert Hunter:

Thank you very much Minister Branko Vukelic. Note what he said, Croatia wants to contribute to the whole spectrum of NATO operations and to bear its fair share of the burden. This is the kind of commitment we are looking for from all our allies, and to come from these three small countries as we are hearing today that started out from so far back and have come so far, I think this is an incredible achievement and in particular, when the 26 NATO allies agreed to go to Afghanistan, that didn't include you, but you're all there. All there, already showing what it means to be an ally before you are allies and we are very much now in your debt already. Now, the third speaker, the MOD of Macedonia, it's a particular honor and point of pride for me to introduce him not only is he someone who has been extraordinarily effective in his current job but someone who has shown the importance of reaching beyond his country to build the kind of understanding, the kind of support to sink the roots of Euro-Atlantic institutions deeply into the body politic. I say that because of his personal leadership of the Euro-Atlantic Club of Macedonia, which is the counterpart of the place we are sitting at today at the Atlantic Council and an honored graduate of what we tried to do at ATA. You make us worthwhile, you make us proud. This is a person who was extremely important at the last summit, wonderful thing called the Balkan bus which collected people from all over the region and deposited them in Istanbul where they did this fantastic job in a war game, the same war-game the Ministers of Defense did in Colorado Spring, the CHODS did and the Perm Reps and we were told afterward the MODs did a good job, the students were next and the CHODs were a disaster, they just argued the whole time (Laughter). And also a thing, an achievement called the Balkan Mosaic, so the Minister here has already demonstrated he's not just looking after his own country, but looking after the entire

region and the entire Euro-Atlantic area to build in a practical sense the security we need in the future. Thank you very much, the floor is yours.

Lazar Elenovski:

Thank you Bob. Again, you surprise me, with your words but also with presence of our friends from ATA. I'm feeling now as a student in front of the professor, so I will think twice about what I will say. I hope I will just pass the exam.

It's a huge privilege and pleasure to give this speech in front of this audience, mostly an American audience, a nation with the values which I have always been inspired from. The President Wilson said once that people are accusing me that I am too idealist, but in a way I am an American. And one of the most visited sights on the planet is this venue of purification from Capitol Hill to Lincoln and Jefferson to White House and Center is the obelisk, next to the obelisk is the memorial of World War II. I remind myself of my two grandfathers, one from the north of Macedonia and another a Muslim Albanian fought together against the big evil. They fought, there were one, first one was injured and the other was captured and sent to a Nazi concentration camp in Austria. They survived and they raised their families on the villages they have fought, so I pay huge respect to them for their heroism and also when I go to Arlington I pay deep respect to those brave men and women who gave their lives for the liberty and freedom of the world.

It's very demanding to explain in 10 minutes what Macedonia and especially we always think pushing in the flock the most importance is the flock. The three are much more important than one, have done in order the processes of independence, after the socialism, socialism was the result from 91, Yugoslavia was interesting because it was not that we entered in that huge transformation of socialist to democratic system but it was independence, 91 was independence here, first recognized at the time in the history and we just started the nation building process. But we don't have time so much to build the nation-building as many other nations and countries have built it in the last century. Because we have just approaching the 21st century and a very different reality was happening in the 21st century. So we already jumped to build one of the most important pillars of Macedonia, which I am very much proud, to build a multi-ethnic concept of the society, which is very hard to put everywhere in the world. And I suppose that many years after of pure good willing and vision for building this concept of the nation we have succeeded, we are speaking today that we are a success story. I would just underline a few examples. For example, what does it mean the reality in Macedonia? The reality in Macedonia means we have always a multiethnic government, we have multiethnic parliament, we have the whole centralization of the power, it comes to the old ethnic communities. There is national identity, there are education, there are language, very good respected and improved. We have two official languages in the parliament and of course from four universities, we have 2 on the Albanian language. And this is not only in the politics, which I want to underline. You know, democracy must be at the end, it is good at the beginning, but the root of democracy must be built in the local people. It is the same in Macedonia, in Kosovo, in Iraq or in Afghanistan. The local people, the people must accept the values of democracy. This is much more than only politics, so I

am very proud of my Macedonians that today we don't have any protests of what are we doing building a multiethnic concept of the country. Sometimes I think it's just taken for granted, but I know all the people in the America, North American, and Canada, it's a strong multicultural model are respecting very much what we have done and what we have achieved and especially from the start we had only 17 years ago.

Also, there are huge reforms in all sectors. I will not repeat as my course; it is clear that the region is moving forward, all our societies, through the MAP, through the EU agenda are moving all the reforms in the police, in the justice, rule of law, economy, democratic society, respect of the human rights, just moving forward. So we are Europeans, we would like to have people to see us as Europeans, not just the people of the Adriatic charter, but all the nations in the region because we have done so much together with Albania and Croatia. I am very grateful for what I have taken as support from my very close friends and partners in all those years and from Brankman, his predecessor but we have built it and we have created the new reality in the region which is very much different than it was only 10 years ago. Now, this region is prosperous, it's just on the front door of the big democratic family, our dream to be a part of this big democratic family, because civilization ally, we belong to this family. The phases, the process is performance based so we know that we are just in front of this door. So we will continue after of course as members, I am very much optimistic, we will continue to bring the final goal of this region, and the final goal is full integration of the whole people and whole nations of the Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic integration. It is our duty as we know that the countries before us supported us very much.

When we speak about defense reforms also I would just like to underline the skills of the defense circle we have fully professional army force we have a multi ethnic army which is very important. It is very easy, when you build this concept inside your country to give the spirit on multinational operations like NATO. And we have continued with few supports of the politics because we have the last decisions from the parliament and no 'ney' votes for the rotations. We have 2.3 GDP for the military budget and of course what is the most important is that the nations considers on this issue. And the parties recognize this process so that we have the full public support of 90%. Which is much more higher than other countries in the alliance. I just want to underline that when you wield this kind of open minded society in your country it is so much easier to bring your perspectives and one of the most important things is that we are building the common values of the alliance. It is very important that in this process we are building the civilization of values. This is not the theory of some political goal, it is very important that we are building the civilization values. That's why we know that 15 years ago when we needed the support of our allies, because we were a young democracy, we knew that some democracies need a push like Iraq or Afghanistan. We believe that Iraqis and Afghanistan's can be free and open minded people and can start building the long way of their democratic society. That's why we are there in Iraq and Afghanistan and that is why we doubled the numbers of troop sizes in Iraq. Some were saying that you cannot say no to the Americans, but it is not true. There are two reasons, one we believe in the same values. We believe that in the 21st century that there should not be any genocides or dictatorships and human violations and torture. Secondly we believe that we cannot turn our backs to our friends. Like you say in America, a friend in need is a friend in deed. This is something that we

will never forget of the United States just as we will never forget the recognition of our constitutional name made by President Bush in 2004.

A few words, just before we start the debate , about enlargement. I would like to speak not only as a minister but also as an Atlantist. In the global era we know that Europe needs to move from the traditional to meeting global challenges. The characteristics of enlargements is one of the main characteristics of enlargement so it is process that is moving and up pushing the democracies around the alliance to be encouraged to take the necessary steps and reforms to be part of the NATO family. It makes both benefits for the alliance and the democracies. We are not just speaking here of enlargement just as a political issue it is much larger than that, it is a civilian issues and civilian advantage for our community. That is why speaking today to Macedonia and Croatia that after all these years of transformation we have fulfilled the basic criteria. We are not speaking that we are perfect, nobody is perfect at the end we still have a lot more transformation to do. We know from both the American and European military side that you must always move forward. But the generally feeling is that we are fulfilling the basic criteria for it and that we deserve to be part of the family. And when we speak of the Macedonian case we think of another issue form which you should speak it is the issue with your name. It is very interesting, it is very strange when you speak of your name. We just want to join the biggest democratic society in the world and we could not agree of the basic democratic right to name your state as you want and your own nation. This is very strange even if we take that this is a bilateral issue. His should not be on the issue of NATO. For one thing this is a political agenda and I have linked NATO agenda to civilian agenda and achievements and taking form that approach. And I know that concerns is the key principles within NATO it provides the strength and unity of the alliance but also organization values. The right of the alliance as a whole to form a consensus, the right of a particular country to give a veto. Which his especially different especially if we are talking about the old cold war veto that we want to but into the new NATO. So it is very strange when are neighbor is speaking on this, it is also very strange when the neighboring countries have been the most supportive for the neighboring countries. Because it was there duty to support and now it is my duty to support Serbia, Bosnia , Albania and Croatia or to support Kosovo for having the whole civilian achievement for the whole transatlantic integration. And also putting on the side all those good things instead of one issue and putting on the side the priorities for the regional integration and cooperation. I am speaking this especially as the public already knows my position on the Croatia, I have been positive for what it has been doing. And I have always been supportive for their agenda as they are largest NATO ally in the region and I always believe that they should take the lead for the integration in the Balkans. I hope that at the end that everything will be separate like we would like from the other side we have agreed to continue with the process under Ambassador Ninets and even today we had negotiation in Athens and was speaking about the Civilization issues and the broader political issues and hope that at the end that we will have the common language. This language is a language of believe in the freedom of liberty and the democratically choice. So at the end just to finish I am a big optimist that the these three nations just in the front of the panel that we will become part of the transatlantic family which we deserve to be/ We have worked very hard and shown that we are a respectful partner ally together in the alliance and within the family. Thank you very much

Richard Hunter:

Wow, with leadership like that, no wonder that you have a 90% approval rating for NATO. I think a lot of the current members of NATO would really like to get our numbers up that high. I like the comment there at the end, the common liberty of freedom and democratic choice. Which sides over all the rest in a multi ethnic society. We had a politician in this country w, who said that al politic is local, which is quite what you said, all democracy is local. To quote Wilson – I am an idealist because I'm an American. Well you are an idealist because you are a Macedonian, we welcome that. Now , I am going to us e the Chairman's prerogative on the first question by having a pro ask the question for the Atlantis Council of the United States, the man who really has done wonders for his organization and I am proud to be associated with him, Fred Kempe.

Fred Kempe:

This is a historic week and the three of you haven't spoken that much about Kosovo. First of all a lot of officials in your country argue that part of the reason why your countries should enlarge is because of this. What would you agree and also what will your countries do specifically in helping serve stability in the region.

Lazar Elenovski:

I will answer as I am closer to Kosovo. It will take three hours with the new road to get there. I think that the role we are playing on regional stability is very important. Ad I think that Croatia and Macedonian and the cooperation we have has been an example of the possibility of stability in the region. Based on this I think we deserve an invitation as we have been working and aiding the Kosovo leaders and understanding the importance of what Kosovo can be. A free and independent Kosovo includes everybody. I also think that it need to be remembered that we have always been responding to the needs of NATO operational capabilities and democratic institutions and the economy , we have been assessed for everything. And lastly I think that in Brussels we had not been talking about Kosovo but our individual performance and that's what came out. But we agree that Kosovo now, especially after the Sunday decision of independence is very, very important for all of us. And what we can do I believe. I think that we can do a lot. I've heard from very articulate persons why Kosovo needs independence form a historical and judicial point of view but also from a neighbor point of view. I have heard Macedonian saying that it is essential to build strong ties with neighbor. I mention a little bit the road that we are working on, because I believe that it is very important that the Markey will be open in the region. We have free trade within the region and we need to bringing Kosovo into that as well. I think what we can do is try and build a partnership, a partnership that just not only include Kosovo leader but EU leaders. I think that we need to move forward with the concern that the Serbs have a life in Kosovo and make sure that we and they reach and that is what they are trying to do . Prime Minister Bermisha was about nine months ago in pristine, it was not easy standing up in the parliament and mention that Kosovo has just one future when Albanian and Serbs work and lead together. And then

reaching to the ministers and speaking with the Serbs and also legion leaders and offering the financial help for working on this cultural and religious heritage. This is symbolic, but I think tells a lot especially as prime minister reached out to the Serbs the day before Kosovo independence. Giving a tractor to farmer over there our great examples of how the leader in Kosovo our trying to reach out to the community. I think that there needs to be a string effort, a conference, World Bank, and EU actors sitting together and to talk about the economic development of Kosovo. Daily needs of the people are very crucial. We talk a lot about the big issues, but often the real issues are what the issue that the people there are facing. Unemployment rates are very high, the economy is not solid, that is what needs to be worked out. And can not be, without any doubt, built up the introduction of strong institutions. While I am confident that the new leadership in Kosovo is going to help move it in the right direction. I keep the Kosovo declaration of independence with me at all times to check it and I think that they are moving with a good program ahead, and we just need to support them.

We believe that this is just the first phase of its implementation, it is very important in the next period that the people and the political actors in Kosovo show, that they are serious about the implementation of the plan. A success will bring the respect from all the others which is very important. The process has started which is very important as we have always spoken that the status has too much status quo on this issue as it is damaging the bigger international processes. Now we believe for this year that the next step on the Atlantic agenda is the invitation for the A3 countries which are very much linked with one and another and it can come to help the integration of the whole region. As my friend Fatmir has said, we are here to support all the nations in the region as our final goal was to have our common future together and to be part of the Euro Atlantic family. So this is an important period, we have just finished the first phase which we have spoken so much about. Now the big challenge is for Kosovo and for democracy, are how to build this multiethnic democratic concept. This will be a difficult challenge, but as I mentioned with the other countries, the democracies need support from us and the international community and with their own efforts they will succeed.

Brank Vukelic:

If you will agree I will continue my answer through an interpreter as my English is not as good.

First of all Croatia has always thought that the independence of Kosovo was unavoidable. Croatia is especially interested in the plan especially in the part regarding minorities. And when we come to the issue of recognizing Kosovo then Croatia will follow the policy of the EU. And what I would like to stress is that solving the issue of status of Kosovo is not only important for helping Kosovo but the stability within the region. Because a stable and democratic Serbia is very important for the EU.

Questions:

Thank you. I am also from John Hopkins. First of all congratulations to all three of your countries for the progress which you have made. And I am tempted to through you a real

softball but I am not going to. The United States is clearly in favor of the plan succeeding. Unfortunately Kucinich is not in favor of it, Nicovich is not in favor with it and other hardliners in Kosovo are not in favor of it, and they have the ability to torpedo it I might also say that Vladimir Putin is not in favor of it. So let me just give you a hypothetical, or at least I hope that it is just a hypothetical question. We have 41 days till the Bucharest summit. Suppose it turns out that in the next 41 days that Serbia is hell bent of self isolation with the persistence of Russia, that they simply want to make Kosovo an issue that trumps everything else. Or as in the absolute worse case, which has been called for by one or two politicians there, are even willing to welcome in Russian troops, even if it is symbolically. Do you still think, remembering that you not only have to convince those at Bucharest but within the US Senate and other parliaments to ratify invitations to think it strengthens your case at this point , or do you think that if it does and you get in that Serbia, which is essential a Russia satellite in the middle of the Balkans , will change NATO strategic position in your part of the world.

I was at the Munich conference when President Putin came out with this famous speech which everybody which every politician was repeating in every meeting that the world is not uni-polar and that the Kosovo issue is not consensus. I was also there when they were in Croatia and said that they see the Balkan as there backyard. That they would never be happy for Albania, Croatia or Macedonia to be part of NATO. They know that it will become Georgia and Ukraine after that. I do not think that they are having so strong interest in Serbia because of Serbia interests but because of Russian interests within the Balkans which are economy security and a lot of other issues related to that. And you see the very strong involvement of the Russia business and energy in the Balkans controlling the natural gas distributions, and we all know that the gas is one of the main issues of security right now. I also want to mention that the people of Serbia voted they knew that independence was coming, so they voted for Krannich. You also have to consider the other part of the population that participated. The question is why- Because they don't see the leadership within Serbia and are considering the problems. There are a lot of difficult in the building of the economy and institution building over there. So I think that it is important now not only help Kosovo but also a fast track operation for EU integration. Kosovo is used a same excuse from Koštunica and the others. But thank god that we have a president in Serbia now who is dedicated to the EU , he made his position clear in Munich, opposes Kosovo independence , but is going to work hard for NATO and EU membership of Serbia. And also the nature of the armed forces we need to consider very carefully. The Serbian forces are very committed to help in EU Integration.

I think that there are a lot of talk over there that link that Serbia is going to move ahead. We know that at this time that there are a lot of tensions because of the decision of independence. But I believe that it is important that the international community working in both ways, trying to establish a good governance in Kosovo and on the other hand trying to give a hope to the people in Serbia that they have a future. I do not think that Serbian will agree that they will be isolated, because they have proved that being isolated creates a lot of problems.

To answer to your questions. Is this going to affect, our membership? I think that the interests of NATO is to help these three countries into NATO . Because this is going to

make the Serbs and Kosovo's think that they perspective could come to be part of the NATO family. It is not just in our three countries that there will be an affect but also in the other Balkan countries as well. I think that it will help stabilize the region, help people look forward not backward, that's my opinion

When speaking about the centre of the congress saluted independence, and I heard today a statement by Senator Lugar about the idea that things have to move on.

If I could also add something, thank you for your question it is a very complex question. All I want to say that unfortunately we as a community can't make it two years ago for I believe much easier. From a strategic point we have lost one or two years with Russia coming back. It was not the suggestion like we had before. Also which is very important, Serbia's place which is in Europe. There is a strong capacity within Serbia which is believing in the strong capacity and values of the Europeans. Unfortunately politics is making a damage, so as my friend Hunter said in his pitch. I have spoken openly and also openly with many Serbs. The main question is who can build a democratic society in that land or in that territory, nobody can build it except the local people they must take the full responsibility this is the reality. If it didn't hurt through the negotiations, any time plan B, how it will strengthen the values and how it will strengthen the democratic society. They are just playing on the old Cold war matrix. It is not the reality, it is the 21st century, so we must move, so we must move forward as a region. It is not so easy for Serbia to accept this. It is in their interest to work and expect this reality. They cannot do anything hypothetical it will be there big stone of integration. The question about the human rights and the development of democratic society this will appear on the agenda of NATO and the EU. So this I think is the best way, I know that this is the first impression and that it is hard. I know that I am a big optimist, but I think that they will see that their interests are the stability and survival of Serbia.

Lazar Elenovski:

First there is a rule that it is not wise for politicians to act on hypothetical questions. First of all I am convinced that the entering on these three countries to NATO will contribute to the security situation and to NATO. Kosovo independence affects are what Serbian politicians are very aware of, and in Serbia there are some pro-democratic forces that are pro-European forces and some radical forces. We would agree that this great Serbia that his part is not in the direction of Kosovo. And that is why we have to support the democratic forces in Serbia which is also in our interests

Robert Hunter:

Back in the old days the easiest way to get people to enter was to have Putin against it.

Questions:

Thank you Ambassador Hunter I am David Smith of Georgetown Security Center, First of all I would like to wish you all well for the Bucharest summit, not just to wish your

countries luck but because your entrance is in the interests of all the other member countries. I would like to ask you a question, Mr Vukelic you mentioned enlarging the zone of stability, Mr Elenovski you talked about enlargement as a principle not just a process and the reasons for doing this, Mr Mediu you said that it will eventually come and Georgia and Ukraine will eventually be at NATO. I would like to ask you a question from two sides of the same coin. First I would like to ask you about the Membership action plan process and Georgia of course is trying to get a membership action plan at Bucharest if not this time soon. What advice would you give to Georgian friends seeing as you are ahead, what advice would you give to make sure that they get ahead. And the other side of that coin is, that we hope soon that you will become members of the alliance what would you like the other 29 members of the alliance to be looking at as they look across the black sea what should they be thinking about when they consider Georgian membership.

Robert Hunter:

That's a good question in which we will not have enough time to answer. Think we will have one more question and then we will wrap up. We will take these two both together.

Question:

How do you see the relationship between Athens's and Tirana vis a vis to your part as membership to NATO and the European union. And you say that the issue is bilateral but still you say that it is a NATO issue. So I was wondering how will you resolve the main issue for you to become a member of NATO.

Robert Hunter:

You know that I was at the Munich meeting last week and the Minister of Moldova spoke and got quickly criticized by the Minister of Romania over the name of the Language and the president of Moldova said, that we are just as old as you are I'll call it what I want and you call it what you want and go to hell. So why don't we start here with Elenovski and Minister Mediu and then our Croatian friend for the last word.

Lazar Elenovski

Ok, First with Georgia it is why we are underlying the job in Europe and how we need to finish the job in Europe because the biggest challenge is of the alliance in the East. Not only from the security side but also from the economic and the democratic. So it is very important for Georgia and every new democracy. To be supported by the allies and as we spoke of earlier individual allies. It is very important to note that Georgia is a contributor in Iraq after the US and the UK and it is extraordinary what they are giving there. I know that they also have some other problems and I know that as an alliance that they have a lot of support for all the other Baltic countries. It can be supportive from the south from Russia. So it is very important that they continue with their development and as we have mentioned not only Georgian also Ukraine and also the other countries as we know that

there are association form central Asia as well. So we know that the Atlantic movement is reaching the border of China accepting those values there is a huge challenge in front of us and that is why we are pushing really hard not to see just the tree but they whole forest. We need to finish here as son as possible the job her and in the Balkans. And to move on with full concentration to what is happening in the East. The other question I will maybe answer later if we get the membership.

Fatmir Mediu:

I have previously said that it is not right to use this type of rhetoric on this issue, because we are having this dispute on the name unfortunately. All the f the democratic values which I have grown up with have taught me that we should not be having this issue. Because form the other side I must underline that. I know that last year that Minister Bakoyannis speaking in the CSIS pointed put that 2.5 Greek Macedonians are feeling Macedonian which is very encouraging I just want to tell you that I very much respect and agree with this fact. If 2.5 people are thinking g and feeling that they are Macedonian which is good as there are another 2 million Macedonians that are feeling Macedonian and have no bad feeling to the Macedonian of the Greek origin. I also know that in Bulgarians that there are some Bulgarians who are feeling Macedonian, so that is the democratic right of these people but also it is the democratic right of my people to feel Macedonian. Thank you

Fatmir Mediu:

I visit here twice,after I met with Minister Sukenko I had to meet with the security committee and a member of the parliament called Kozansico over there who opposed the NATO membership of the Ukraine, but I want to again say that they are no longer as they elected new government and the new government elected is pro European and pro NATO government. And form this meeting they decided to be a full member of CEDON which is showing commitment to work side by side with NATO and the same strategy within Iraq and also within Afghanistan. I think that with Ukraine and Georgian will still institutional be part of the EU and I believe that the EU process , that EU always has to consider all of the EU countries to be member countries, the concern which I do have. The concern which I do have I the problem of popular support. These two problems create internal problems within there society. So I think that the idea to extend the plan for a membership action plan is very good. But the leadership in Ukraine and Georgia need to be very careful about the way theta they pose it to the public opinion because it is not quite there the understanding exactly of what NATO means . And I think that there is a lot of Russia propaganda and influence about the threat which NATO will bring. So I think that based on that the extension of the membership action plan to Georgia is a good idea . I know that in Munich they asked to become member and the same with the president of Ukraine, the prime minister wasn't opposing it but the new prime of Ukraine was proposing it. So I think that it is important for the alliance especially with the uni-security threats throughout the world and that Ukraine and Georgia become apart of it . But still Ukraine and Georgia need to be following a membership action plan. That's my opinion. How we can effect this as new members we are sharing seat as is

Albania when we invite first Ukraine is a small part of it step involving it the full membership. Speaking about the relationship with Greece. I think that our relationship is great. I have a really good relationship with Minister Meimarakis, as our Minister of foreign affairs says how can you not have a good relationship with Minister Meimarakis everybody gets along with him she is a very articulate quiet lady. And can tell you that the two commandos of NATO were Greeks, General Ringes and General Muches so we have a constant relationship with the transformation of the European armed forces and we really appreciate that , and we do and continue to have a special relationship with Greece. With the NATO and EU in our country and our neighbor and as you now we have a great minority within Albania that we are having great relations with , who are members of our government so we are building in that sense a really good example of how we can work with minorities and I think that this is a very good point.

Robert Hunter:

Thank you and the final word goes to Fatmir.

Fatmir Mediu:

As a representative of a country which is only expecting an invitation to NATO I would not like to discuss issues that are in the domain of all members. But I can talk about the experience of my country and these other countries in the regard of the US Atlantic Charter about the cooperation that we have in the trying to fulfill and reach the charter. And I can say that such a cooperation and joining other countries that see joining NATO and EU in there perspectives is a very good thing.

Robert Hunter

First of all I would like to thank the three minister s to joining you today. I would also like to thank Fred Kempe and his team. I think that the decisions in 43 days is not whether NATO will take these three in but whether in but the importance for NATO to join them. Thank you